

II

NATURAL RIGHT AND THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN FACTS AND VALUES



THE historicist contention can be reduced to the assertion that natural right is impossible because philosophy in the full sense of the term is impossible. Philosophy is possible only if there is an absolute horizon or a natural horizon in contradistinction to the historically changing horizons or the caves. In other words, philosophy is possible only if man, while incapable of acquiring wisdom or full understanding of the whole, is capable of knowing what he does not know, that is to say, of grasping the fundamental problems and therewith the fundamental alternatives, which are, in principle, coeval with human thought. But the possibility of philosophy is only the necessary and not the sufficient condition of natural right. The possibility of philosophy does not require more than that the fundamental problems always be the same; but there cannot be natural right if the fundamental problem of political philosophy cannot be solved in a final manner.

If philosophy in general is possible, political philosophy in particular is possible. Political philosophy is possible if man is capable of understanding the fundamental political alternative which is at the bottom of the ephemeral or accidental alternatives. Yet if political philosophy is limited to understanding the fundamental political alternative, it is of no practical value. It would be unable to answer the question of what the ultimate goal of wise action is. It would have to delegate the crucial decision to blind choice. The whole galaxy of political philosophers from Plato to Hegel, and certainly all ad-

herents of natural right, assumed that the fundamental political problem is susceptible of a final solution. This assumption ultimately rested on the Socratic answer to the question of how man ought to live. By realizing that we are ignorant of the most important things, we realize at the same time that the most important thing for us, or the one thing needful, is quest for knowledge of the most important things or quest for wisdom. That this conclusion is not barren of political consequences is known to every reader of Plato's *Republic* or of Aristotle's *Politics*. It is true that the successful quest for wisdom might lead to the result that wisdom is not the one thing needful. But this result would owe its relevance to the fact that it is the result of the quest for wisdom: the very disavowal of reason must be reasonable disavowal. Regardless of whether this possibility affects the validity of the Socratic answer, the perennial conflict between the Socratic and the anti-Socratic answer creates the impression that the Socratic answer is as arbitrary as its opposite, or that the perennial conflict is insoluble. Accordingly, many present-day social scientists who are not historicists or who do admit the existence of fundamental and unchanging alternatives deny that human reason is capable of solving the conflict between these alternatives. Natural right is then rejected today not only because all human thought is held to be historical but likewise because it is thought that there is a variety of unchangeable principles of right or of goodness which conflict with one another, and none of which can be proved to be superior to the others.

Substantially, this is the position taken by Max Weber. Our discussion will be limited to a critical analysis of Weber's view. No one since Weber has devoted a comparable amount of intelligence, assiduity, and almost fanatical devotion to the basic problem of the social sciences. Whatever may have been his errors, he is the greatest social scientist of our century.

Weber, who regarded himself as a disciple of the historical

school¹ came very close to historicism, and a strong case can be made for the view that his reservations against historicism were halfhearted and inconsistent with the broad tendency of his thinking. He parted company with the historical school, not because it had rejected natural norms, i.e., norms that are both universal and objective, but because it had tried to establish standards that were particular and historical indeed, but still objective. He objected to the historical school not because it had blurred the idea of natural right but because it had preserved natural right in a historical guise, instead of rejecting it altogether. The historical school had given natural right a historical character by insisting on the ethnic character of all genuine right or by tracing all genuine right to unique folk minds, as well as by assuming that the history of mankind is a meaningful process or a process ruled by intelligible necessity. Weber rejected both assumptions as metaphysical, i.e., as based on the dogmatic premise that reality is rational. Since Weber assumed that the real is always individual, he could state the premise of the historical school also in these terms: the individual is an emanation from the general or from the whole. According to Weber, however, individual or partial phenomena can be understood only as effects of other individual or partial phenomena, and never as effects of wholes such as folk minds. To try to explain historical or unique phenomena by tracing them to general laws or to unique wholes means to assume gratuitously that there are mysterious or unanalyzable forces which move the historical actors.² There is no "meaning" of history apart from the "subjective" meaning or the intentions which animate the historical actors. But these intentions are of such limited power that the actual out-

1. *Gesammelte politische Schriften*, p. 22; *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 208.

2. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 13, 15, 18, 19, 28, 35-37, 134, 137, 174, 195, 230; *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 517.

come is in most cases wholly unintended. Yet the actual outcome—historical fate—which is not planned by God or man, molds not only our way of life but our very thoughts, and especially does it determine our ideals.³ Weber was, however, still too much impressed by the idea of science to accept historicism without qualification. In fact, one is tempted to suggest that the primary motive of his opposition to the historical school and to historicism in general was devotion to the idea of empirical science as it prevailed in his generation. The idea of science forced him to insist on the fact that all science as such is independent of *Weltanschauung*: both natural and social science claim to be equally valid for Westerners and for Chinese, i.e., for people whose “world views” are radically different. The historical genesis of modern science—the fact that it is of Western origin—is wholly irrelevant as regards its validity. Nor did Weber have any doubt that modern science is absolutely superior to any earlier form of thinking orientation in the world of nature and society. That superiority can be established objectively, by reference to the rules of logic.⁴ There arose, however, in Weber’s mind this difficulty in regard to the social sciences in particular. He insisted on the objective and universal validity of social science in so far as it is a body of true propositions. Yet these propositions are only a part of social science. They are the results of scientific investigation or the answers to questions. The questions which we address to social phenomena depend on the direction of our interest or on our point of view, and these on our value ideas. But the value ideas are historically relative. Hence the substance of social science is radically historical; for it is the value ideas and the direction of interest which determine the whole conceptual framework of the social sciences. Accordingly, it does not

3. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 152, 183, 224 n.; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 19, 437; *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, I, 82, 524.

4. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 58–60, 97, 105, 111, 155, 160, 184.

make sense to speak of, a "natural frame of reference" or to expect a final system of the basic concepts: all frames of reference are ephemeral. Every conceptual scheme used by social science articulates the basic problems, and these problems change with the change of the social and cultural situation. Social science is necessarily the understanding of society from the point of view of the present. What is trans-historical are merely the findings regarding the facts and their causes. More precisely, what is trans-historical is the validity of these findings; but the importance or significance of any findings depends on value ideas and hence on historically changeable principles. Ultimately, this applies to every science. All science presupposes that science is valuable, but this presupposition is the product of certain cultures, and hence historically relative.⁵ However, the concrete and historical value ideas, of which there is an indefinitely large variety, contain elements of a trans-historical character: the ultimate values are as timeless as the principles of logic. It is the recognition of timeless values that distinguishes Weber's position most significantly from historicism. Not so much historicism as a peculiar notion of timeless values is the basis of his rejection of natural right.⁶

Weber never explained what he understood by "values." He was primarily concerned with the relations of values to facts. Facts and values are absolutely heterogeneous, as is shown directly by the absolute heterogeneity of questions of fact and questions of value. No conclusion can be drawn from any fact as to its valuable character, nor can we infer the factual character of something from its being valuable or desirable. Neither time-serving nor wishful thinking is supported by reason. By proving that a given social order is the goal of the historical process, one does not say anything as to the value or desirable character of that order. By showing that

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 152, 170, 184, 206-9, 213-14, 259, 261-62.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 62, 152, 213, 247, 463, 467, 469, 472; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 22, 60.

certain religious or ethical ideas had a very great effect or no effect, one does not say anything about the value of those ideas. To understand a factual or possible evaluation is something entirely different from approving or forgiving that evaluation. Weber contended that the absolute heterogeneity of facts and values necessitates the ethically neutral character of social science: social science can answer questions of facts and their causes; it is not competent to answer questions of value. He insisted very strongly on the role played by values in social science: the objects of social science are constituted by "reference to values." Without such "reference," there would be no focus of interest, no reasonable selection of themes, no principles of distinction between relevant and irrelevant facts. Through "reference to values" the objects of the social sciences emerge out of the ocean or morass of facts. But Weber insisted no less strongly on the fundamental difference between "reference to values" and "value judgments": by saying that something is relevant with regard to political freedom, for example, one does not take a stand for or against political freedom. The social scientist does not evaluate the objects constituted by "reference to values"; he merely explains them by tracing them to their causes. The values to which social science refers and among which acting man chooses are in need of clarification. This clarification is the function of social philosophy. But even social philosophy cannot solve the crucial value problems. It cannot criticize value judgments that are not self-contradictory.⁷

Weber contended that his notion of a "value-free" or ethically neutral social science is fully justified by what he re-

7. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 90, 91, 124, 125, 150, 151, 154, 155, 461-65, 469-73, 475, 545, 550; *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*, pp. 417-18, 476-77, 482. As regards the connection between the limitation of social science to the study of facts and the belief in the authoritative character of natural science, see *Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*, p. 478.

garded as the most fundamental of all oppositions, namely, the opposition of the Is and the Ought, or the opposition of reality and norm or value.⁸ But the conclusion from the radical heterogeneity of the Is and the Ought to the impossibility of an evaluating social science is obviously not valid. Let us assume that we had genuine knowledge of right and wrong, or of the Ought, or of the true value system. That knowledge, while not derived from empirical science, would legitimately direct all empirical social science; it would be the foundation of all empirical social science. For social science is meant to be of practical value. It tries to find means for given ends. For this purpose it has to understand the ends. Regardless of whether the ends are "given" in a different manner from the means, the end and the means belong together; therefore, "the end belongs to the same science as the means."⁹ If there were genuine knowledge of the ends, that knowledge would naturally guide all search for means. There would be no reason to delegate knowledge of the ends to social philosophy and the search for the means to an independent social science. Based on genuine knowledge of the true ends, social science would search for the proper means to those ends; it would lead up to objective and specific value judgments regarding policies. Social science would be a truly policy-making, not to say architectonic, science rather than a mere supplier of data for the real policy-makers. The true reason why Weber insisted on the ethically neutral character of social science as well as of social philosophy was, then, not his belief in the fundamental opposition of the Is and the Ought but his belief that there cannot be any genuine knowledge of the Ought. He denied to man any science, empirical or rational, any knowledge, scientific or philosophic, of the true value system: the true value system does not exist; there is a variety of values which are of the same

8. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 32, 40 n., 127 n., 148, 401, 470-71, 501, 577.

9. Aristotle *Physics* 194^a26-27.

rank, whose demands conflict with one another, and whose conflict cannot be solved by human reason. Social science or social philosophy can do no more than clarify that conflict and all its implications; the solution has to be left to the free, non-rational decision of each individual.

I contend that Weber's thesis necessarily leads to nihilism or to the view that every preference, however evil, base, or insane, has to be judged before the tribunal of reason to be as legitimate as any other preference. An unmistakable sign of this necessity is supplied by a statement of Weber about the prospects of Western civilization. He saw this alternative: either a spiritual renewal ("wholly new prophets or a powerful renaissance of old thoughts and ideals") or else "mechanized petrification, varnished by a kind of convulsive sense of self-importance," i.e., the extinction of every human possibility but that of "specialists without spirit or vision and voluptuaries without heart." Confronted with this alternative, Weber felt that the decision in favor of either possibility would be a judgment of value or of faith, and hence beyond the competence of reason.¹⁰ This amounts to an admission that the way of life of "specialists without spirit or vision and voluptuaries without heart" is as defensible as the ways of life recommended by Amos or by Socrates.

To see this more clearly and to see at the same time why Weber could conceal from himself the nihilistic consequence of his doctrine of values, we have to follow his thought step by step. In following this movement toward its end we shall inevitably reach a point beyond which the scene is darkened by the shadow of Hitler. Unfortunately, it does not go without saying that in our examination we must avoid the fallacy that in the last decades has frequently been used as a substitute for the *reductio ad absurdum*: the *reductio ad Hitlerum*. A view is not

10. Compare *Religionssoziologie*, I, 204, with *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 469-70 and 150-51.

refuted by the fact that it happens to have been shared by Hitler.

Weber started out from a combination of the views of Kant as they were understood by certain neo-Kantians and of the views of the historical school. From neo-Kantianism he took over his general notion of the character of science, as well as of "individual" ethics. Accordingly, he rejected utilitarianism and every form of eudemonism. From the historical school he took over the view that there is no possible social or cultural order which can be said to be *the* right or rational order. He combined the two positions by means of the distinction between moral commands (or ethical imperatives) and cultural values. Moral commands appeal to our conscience, whereas cultural values appeal to our feelings: the individual ought to fulfil his moral duties, whereas it depends entirely on his arbitrary will whether he wishes to realize cultural ideals or not. Cultural ideals or values lack the specific obligatory character of the moral imperatives. These imperatives have a dignity of their own, with whose recognition Weber seemed to be greatly concerned. But, precisely because of the fundamental difference between moral commands and cultural values, ethics proper is silent in regard to cultural and social questions. Whereas gentlemen, or honest men, necessarily agree as to things moral, they legitimately disagree in regard to such things as Gothic architecture, private property, monogamy, democracy, and so on.¹¹

One is thus led to think that Weber admitted the existence of absolutely binding rational norms, namely, the moral imperatives. Yet one sees immediately afterward that what he said about the moral commands is not much more than the residue of a tradition in which he was brought up and which, indeed, never ceased to determine him as a human being. What

11. *Politische Schriften*, p. 22; *Religionssoziologie*, I, 33-35; *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 30, 148, 154, 155, 252, 463, 466, 471; *Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*, p. 418.

he really thought was that ethical imperatives are as subjective as cultural values. According to him, it is as legitimate to reject ethics in the name of cultural values as it is to reject cultural values in the name of ethics, or to adopt any combination of both types of norm which is not self-contradictory.¹² This decision was the inevitable consequence of his notion of ethics. He could not reconcile his view that ethics is silent about the right social order with the undeniable ethical relevance of social questions, except by "relativizing" ethics. It was on this basis that he developed his concept of "personality" or of the dignity of man. The true meaning of "personality" depends on the true meaning of "freedom." Provisionally, one may say that human action is free to the extent to which it is not affected by external compulsion or irresistible emotions but is guided by rational consideration of means and ends. Yet true freedom requires ends of a certain kind, and these ends have to be adopted in a certain manner. The ends must be anchored in ultimate values. Man's dignity, his being exalted far above everything merely natural or above all brutes, consists in his setting up autonomously his ultimate values, in making these values his constant ends, and in rationally choosing the means to these ends. The dignity of man consists in his autonomy, i.e., in the individual's freely choosing his own values or his own ideals or in obeying the injunction: "Become what thou art."¹³

At this stage, we still have something resembling an objective norm, a categorical imperative: "Thou shalt have ideals." That imperative is "formal"; it does not determine in any way the content of the ideals, but it might still seem to establish an intelligible or nonarbitrary standard that would allow us to distinguish in a responsible manner between human excel-

12. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 38, n. 2, 40-41, 155, 463, 466-69; *Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*, p. 423.

13. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 38, 40, 132-33, 469-70, 533-34, 555.

lence and depravity. Therewith it might seem to create a universal brotherhood of all noble souls; of all men who are not enslaved by their appetites, their passions, and their selfish interests; of all "idealists"—of all men who can justly esteem or respect one another. Yet this is only a delusion. What seems at first to be an invisible church proves to be a war of everybody against everybody or, rather, pandemonium. Weber's own formulation of his categorical imperative was "Follow thy demon" or "Follow thy god or demon." It would be unfair to complain that Weber forgot the possibility of evil demons, although he may have been guilty of underestimating them. If he had thought only of good demons, he would have been forced to admit an objective criterion that would allow him to distinguish in principle between good and evil demons. His categorical imperative actually means "Follow thy demon, regardless of whether he is a good or evil demon." For there is an insoluble, deadly conflict between the various values among which man has to choose. What one man considers following God another will consider, with equal right, following the Devil. The categorical imperative has then to be formulated as follows: "Follow God or the Devil as you will, but, whichever choice you make, make it with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your power."¹⁴ What is absolutely base is to follow one's appetites, passions, or self-interest and to be indifferent or lukewarm toward ideals or values, toward gods or devils.

Weber's "idealism," i.e., his recognition of all "ideal" goals or of all "causes," seems to permit of a nonarbitrary distinction between excellence and baseness or depravity. At the same time, it culminates in the imperative "Follow God or the Devil," which means, in nontheological language, "Strive resolutely for excellence or baseness." For if Weber meant to say that choosing value system A in preference to

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 455, 466–69, 546; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 435–36.

value system B is compatible with genuine respect for value system B or does not mean rejecting value system B as base, he could not have known what he was talking about in speaking of a choice between God and Devil; he must have meant a mere difference of tastes while talking of a deadly conflict. It thus appears that for Weber, in his capacity as a social philosopher, excellence and baseness completely lost their primary meaning. Excellence now means devotion to a cause, be it good or evil, and baseness means indifference to all causes. Excellence and baseness thus understood are excellence and baseness of a higher order. They belong to a dimension that is exalted far above the dimension of action. They can be seen only after one has completely broken away from the world in which we have to make decisions, although they present themselves as preceding any decision. They are the correlates of a purely theoretical attitude toward the world of action. That theoretical attitude implies equal respect for all causes; but such respect is possible only for him who is not devoted to any cause. Now if excellence is devotion to a cause and baseness indifference to all causes, the theoretical attitude toward all causes would have to be qualified as base. No wonder, then, that Weber was driven to question the value of theory, of science, of reason, of the realm of the mind, and therewith of both the moral imperatives and the cultural values. He was forced to dignify what he called "purely 'vitalistic' values" to the same height as the moral commands and the cultural values. The "purely 'vitalistic' values" may be said to belong entirely to "the sphere of one's own individuality," being, that is, purely personal and in no way principles of a cause. Hence they are not, strictly speaking, values. Weber contended explicitly that it is perfectly legitimate to take a hostile attitude toward all impersonal and supra-personal values and ideals, and therewith toward every concern with "personality" or the dignity of man as previously defined; for, according

to him, there is only one way to become a "personality," namely, through absolute devotion to a cause. At the moment when the "vitalistic" values are recognized as of equal rank with cultural values, the categorical imperative "Thou shalt have ideals" is being transformed into the command "Thou shalt live passionately." Baseness no longer means indifference to any of the incompatible great objects of humanity, but being engrossed with one's comfort and prestige. But with what right except that of arbitrary whim can one reject the way of life of the philistine in the name of "vitalistic" values, if one can reject the moral commands in the name of "vitalistic" values? It was in tacit recognition of the impossibility of stopping on the downward path that Weber frankly admitted that it is merely a subjective judgment of faith or value if one despises "specialists without spirit or vision and voluptuaries without heart" as degraded human beings. The final formulation of Weber's ethical principle would thus be "Thou shalt have preferences"—an Ought whose fulfilment is fully guaranteed by the Is.¹⁵

One last obstacle to complete chaos seems to remain. Whatever preferences I may have or choose, I must act rationally: I must be honest with myself, I must be consistent in my adherence to my fundamental objectives, and I must rationally choose the means required by my ends. But why? What difference can this still make after we have been reduced to a condition in which the maxims of the heartless voluptuary as well as those of the sentimental philistine have to be regarded as no less defensible than those of the idealist, of the gentleman, or of the saint? We cannot take seriously this belated insistence on responsibility and sanity, this inconsistent concern with consistency, this irrational praise of rationality. Can one not very easily make out a stronger case for inconsistency than Weber has made out for preferring cultural values to the moral

15. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 61, 152, 456, 468-69, 531; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 443-44.

imperatives? Does one not necessarily imply the depreciation of rationality in every form at the moment in which one declares it legitimate to make "vitalistic" values one's supreme values? Weber would probably have insisted that, whatever preference one adopts, one has to be honest, at least with one's self, and especially that one must not make the dishonest attempt to give one's preferences an objective foundation which would necessarily be a sham foundation. But, should he have done so, he would merely have been inconsistent. For, according to him, it is equally legitimate to will or not to will truth, or to reject truth in favor of the beautiful and the sacred.¹⁶ Why, then, should one not prefer pleasing delusions or edifying myths to the truth? Weber's regard for "rational self-determination" and "intellectual honesty" is a trait of his character which has no basis but his nonrational preference for "rational self-determination" and "intellectual honesty."

One may call the nihilism to which Weber's thesis leads "noble nihilism." For that nihilism stems not from a primary indifference to everything noble but from the alleged or real insight into the baseless character of everything thought to be noble. Yet one cannot make a distinction between noble and base nihilism except if one has some knowledge of what is noble and what is base. But such knowledge transcends nihilism. In order to be entitled to describe Weber's nihilism as noble, one must have broken with his position.

One could make the following objection to the foregoing criticism. What Weber really meant cannot be expressed in terms of "values" or "ideals" at all; it is much more adequately expressed by his quotation "Become what thou art," i.e., "Choose thy fate." According to this interpretation, Weber rejected objective norms because objective norms are incompatible with human freedom or with the possibility of acting. We must leave it open whether this reason for rejecting

16. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 60-61, 184, 546, 554.

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objective norms is a good reason and whether the nihilistic consequence would be avoided by this interpretation of Weber's view. It is sufficient to remark that its acceptance would require a break with the notions of "value" and "ideal" on which Weber's actual doctrine is built and that it is that actual doctrine, and not the possible interpretation mentioned, which dominates present-day social science.

Many social scientists of our time seem to regard nihilism as a minor inconvenience which wise men would bear with equanimity, since it is the price one has to pay for obtaining that highest good, a truly scientific social science. They seem to be satisfied with any scientific findings, although they cannot be more than "barren truths which generate no conclusion," the conclusions being generated by purely subjective value judgments or arbitrary preferences. We have to consider, therefore, whether social science as a purely theoretical pursuit, but still as a pursuit leading to the understanding of social phenomena, is possible on the basis of the distinction between facts and values.

We remind ourselves again of Weber's statement about the prospects of Western civilization. As we observed, Weber saw the following alternative: either a spiritual renewal or else "mechanized petrification," i.e., the extinction of every human possibility except that of "specialists without spirit or vision and voluptuaries without heart." He concluded: "But by making this statement we enter the province of judgments of value and faith with which this purely historical presentation shall not be burdened." It is not proper, then, for the historian or social scientist, it is not permissible, that he truthfully describe a certain type of life as spiritually empty or describe specialists without vision and voluptuaries without heart as what they are. But is this not absurd? Is it not the plain duty of the social scientist truthfully and faithfully to present social phenomena? How can we give a causal explana-

tion of a social phenomenon if we do not first see it as what it is? Do we not know petrification or spiritual emptiness when we see it? And if someone is incapable of seeing phenomena of this kind, is he not disqualified by this very fact from being a social scientist, just as much as a blind man is disqualified from being an analyst of painting?

Weber was particularly concerned with the sociology of ethics and of religion. That sociology presupposes a fundamental distinction between "ethos" and "techniques of living" (or "prudential" rules). The sociologist must then be able to recognize an "ethos" in its distinctive character; he must have a feel for it, an appreciation of it, as Weber admitted. But does such appreciation not necessarily imply a value judgment? Does it not imply the realization that a given phenomenon is a *genuine* "ethos" and not a *mere* "technique of living"? Would one not laugh out of court a man who claimed to have written a sociology of art but who actually had written a sociology of trash? The sociologist of religion must distinguish between phenomena which have a religious character and phenomena which are a-religious. To be able to do this, he must know what religion is, he must have understanding of religion. Now, contrary to what Weber suggested, such understanding enables and forces him to distinguish between genuine and spurious religion, between higher and lower religions: those religions are higher in which the specifically religious motivations are effective to a higher degree. Or shall we say that the sociologist is permitted to note the presence or absence of religion or of "ethos"—for this would be merely factual observation—but must not dare to pronounce on the degree to which it is present, i.e., on the rank of the particular religion or "ethos" he is studying? The sociologist of religion cannot help noting the difference between those who try to gain the favor of their gods by flattering and bribing them and those who try to gain it by a change of heart. Can he see this

difference without seeing at the same time the difference of rank which it implies, the difference between a mercenary and a nonmercenary attitude? Is he not forced to realize that the attempt to bribe the gods is tantamount to trying to be the lord or employer of the gods and that there is a fundamental incongruity between such attempts and what men divine when speaking of gods? In fact, Weber's whole sociology of religion stands or falls by such distinctions as those between "ethics of intention" and "priestly formalism" (or "petrified maxims"); "sublime" religious thought and "pure sorcery"; "the fresh source of a really, and not merely apparently, profound insight" and "a maze of wholly unintuitive, symbolistic images"; "plastic imagination" and "bookish thinking." His work would be not merely dull but absolutely meaningless if he did not speak almost constantly of practically all intellectual and moral virtues and vices in the appropriate language, i.e., in the language of praise and blame. I have in mind expressions like these: "grand figures," "incomparable grandeur," "perfection that is nowhere surpassed," "pseudo-systematics," "this laxity was undoubtedly a product of decline," "absolutely unartistic," "ingenious explanations," "highly educated," "unrivalled majestic account," "power, plasticity, and precision of formulation," "sublime character of the ethical demands," "perfect inner consistency," "crude and abstruse notions," "manly beauty," "pure and deep conviction," "impressive achievement," "works of art of the first rank." Weber paid some attention to the influence of Puritanism on poetry, music, and so on. He noted a certain negative effect of Puritanism on these arts. This fact (if it is a fact) owes its relevance exclusively to the circumstance that a genuinely religious impulse of a very high order was the cause of the decline of art, i.e., of the "drying-up" of previously existing genuine and high art. For, clearly, no one in his senses would voluntarily pay the slightest attention to a case in

which a languishing superstition caused the production of trash. In the case studied by Weber, the cause was a genuine and high religion, and the effect was the decline of art: both the cause and the effect become visible only on the basis of value judgments as distinguished from mere reference to values. Weber had to choose between blindness to the phenomena and value judgments. In his capacity as a practicing social scientist, he chose wisely.¹⁷

The prohibition against value judgments in social science would lead to the consequence that we are permitted to give a strictly factual description of the overt acts that can be observed in concentration camps and perhaps an equally factual analysis of the motivation of the actors concerned: we would not be permitted to speak of cruelty. Every reader of such a description who is not completely stupid would, of course, see that the actions described are cruel. The factual description would, in truth, be a bitter satire. What claimed to be a straightforward report would be an unusually circumlocutory report. The writer would deliberately suppress his better knowledge, or, to use Weber's favorite term, he would commit an act of intellectual dishonesty. Or, not to waste any moral ammunition on things that are not worthy of it, the whole procedure reminds one of a childish game in which you lose if you pronounce certain words, to the use of which you are constantly incited by your playmates. Weber, like every other man who ever discussed social matters in a relevant manner, could not avoid speaking of avarice, greed, unscrupulousness, vanity, devotion, sense of proportion, and similar things, i.e., making value judgments. He expressed indignation against people who did not see the difference between Gretchen and a

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 380, 462, 481-83, 486, 493, 554; *Religionssoziologie*, I, 33, 82, 112 n., 185 ff., 429, 513; II, 165, 167, 173, 242 n., 285, 316, 370; III, 2 n., 118, 139, 207, 209-10, 221, 241, 257, 268, 274, 323, 382, 385 n.; *Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*, p. 469; *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp. 240, 246, 249, 266.

prostitute, i.e., who failed to see the nobility of sentiment present in the one but absent from the other. What Weber implied can be formulated as follows: prostitution is a recognized subject of sociology; this subject cannot be seen if the degrading character of prostitution is not seen at the same time; if one sees the fact "prostitution," as distinguished from an arbitrary abstraction, one has already made a value judgment. What would become of political science if it were not permitted to deal with phenomena like narrow party spirit, boss rule, pressure groups, statesmanship, corruption, even moral corruption, i.e., with phenomena which are, as it were, constituted by value judgments? To put the terms designating such things in quotation marks is a childish trick which enables one to talk of important subjects while denying the principles without which there cannot be important subjects—a trick which is meant to allow one to combine the advantages of common sense with the denial of common sense. Or can one say anything relevant on public opinion polls, for example, without realizing the fact that many answers to the questionnaires are given by unintelligent, uninformed, deceitful, and irrational people, and that not a few questions are formulated by people of the same caliber—can one say anything relevant about public opinion polls without committing one value judgment after another?¹⁸

Or let us look at an example that Weber himself discussed at some length. The political scientist or historian has, for example, to explain actions of statesmen and generals, i.e., he has to trace their actions to their causes. He cannot do this without answering the question of whether the action concerned was caused by rational consideration of means and ends or by emotional factors, for example. For this purpose he has to construct the model of a perfectly

18. *Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 158; *Religionssoziologie*, I, 41, 170 n.; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 331, 435-36.

rational action in the given circumstances. Only thus will he be able to see which nonrational factors, if any, deflected the action from the strictly rational course. Weber admitted that this procedure implies evaluation: we are forced to say that the actor in question made this or that mistake. But, Weber argued, the construction of the model and the ensuing value judgment on the deviation from the model are merely a transitional stage in the process of causal explanation.¹⁹ As good children, we are then to forget as soon as possible what, in passing by, we could not help noticing but were not supposed to notice. But, in the first place, if the historian shows, by objectively measuring the action of a statesman against the model of "rational action in the circumstances," that the statesman made one blunder after another, he makes an objective value judgment to the effect that the statesman was singularly inept. In another case the historian arrives by the same procedure at the equally objective value judgment that a general showed unusual resourcefulness, resolution, and prudence. It is impossible to understand phenomena of this kind without being aware of the standard of judgment that is inherent in the situation and accepted as a matter of course by the actors themselves; and it is impossible not to make use of that standard by actually evaluating. In the second place, one may wonder whether what Weber regarded as merely incidental or transitional—namely, the insight into the ways of folly and wisdom, of cowardice and bravery, of barbarism and humanity, and so on—is not more worthy of the interest of the historian than any causal explanation along Weberian lines. As for the question whether the inevitable and unobjectionable value judgments should be expressed or suppressed, it is really the question of how they should be expressed, "where, when, by whom, and toward whom"; it belongs, therefore, before another tribunal than that of the methodology of the social sciences.

19. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 125, 129–30, 337–38; *Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*, p. 483.

Social science could avoid value judgments only by keeping strictly within the limits of a purely historical or "interpretive" approach. The social scientist would have to bow without a murmur to the self-interpretation of his subjects. He would be forbidden to speak of "morality," "religion," "art," "civilization," and so on, when interpreting the thought of peoples or tribes who are unaware of such notions. On the other hand, he would have to accept as morality, religion, art, knowledge, state, etc., whatever claimed to be morality, religion, art, etc. As a matter of fact, there exists a sociology of knowledge according to which everything that pretends to be knowledge—even if it is notorious nonsense—has to be accepted as knowledge by the sociologist. Weber himself identified the types of legitimate rule with what are thought to be types of legitimate rule. But this limitation exposes one to the danger of falling victim to every deception and every self-deception of the people one is studying; it penalizes every critical attitude; taken by itself, it deprives social science of every possible value. The self-interpretation of a blundering general cannot be accepted by the political historian, and the self-interpretation of a silly rhymmer cannot be accepted by the historian of literature. Nor can the social scientist afford to rest content with the interpretation of a given phenomenon that is accepted by the group within which it occurs. Are groups less liable to deceive themselves than individuals? It was easy for Weber to make the following demand: "What is alone important [for describing a given quality as charismatic] is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his 'followers' or 'disciples.'" Eight lines later, we read: "Another type [of charismatic leader] is that of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, who, however, cannot be classified in this way with absolute certainty since there is a possibility that he was a very sophisticated type of swindler," i.e., that he merely pretended to have a charisma. It would be unfair to insist on

the fact that the German original is, to say the least, much less explicit and emphatic than the English translation; for the problem implicitly raised by the translator—namely, the problem concerning the difference between genuine and pretended charisma, between genuine prophets and pseudo-prophets, between genuine leaders and successful charlatans—cannot be disposed of by silence.²⁰ The sociologist cannot be obliged to abide by the legal fictions which a given group never dared to regard as legal fictions; he is forced to make a distinction between how a given group actually conceives of the authority by which it is ruled and the true character of the authority in question. On the other hand, the strictly historical approach, which limits itself to understanding people in the way in which they understand themselves, may be very fruitful if kept in its place. By realizing this, we grasp a legitimate motive underlying the demand for a nonevaluating social science.

Today it is trivial to say that the social scientist ought not to judge societies other than his own by the standards of his society. It is his boast that he does not praise or blame, but understands. But he cannot understand without a conceptual framework or a frame of reference. Now his frame of reference is more likely than not to be a mere reflection of the way in which his own society understands itself in his time. Accordingly, he will interpret societies other than his own in terms that are wholly alien to those societies. He will force these societies into the Procrustean bed of his conceptual scheme. He will not understand these societies as they understand themselves. Since the self-interpretation of a society is an essential element of its being, he will not understand these societies as they really are. And since one cannot understand one's own society adequately if one does not understand other societies, he will not even be able really to understand his own

20. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 359, 361; compare *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp. 140–41, 753.

society. He has then to understand various societies of the past and present, or significant "parts" of those societies, exactly as they understand or understood themselves. Within the limits of this purely historical and hence merely preparatory or ancillary work, that kind of objectivity which implies the foregoing of evaluations is legitimate and even indispensable from every point of view. Particularly in regard to such a phenomenon as a doctrine, it is obvious that one cannot judge of its soundness or explain it in sociological or other terms before one has understood it, i.e., before one has understood it exactly as its originator understood it.

It is curious that Weber, who was so fond of that kind of objectivity which requires the forgoing of value judgments, was almost blind in regard to the sphere which may be said to be the home, and the only home, of nonevaluating objectivity. He realized clearly that the conceptual framework which he used was rooted in the social situation of his time. It is easy to see, for instance, that his distinction of three ideal types of legitimacy (traditional, rational, and charismatic) reflects the situation as it existed in Continental Europe after the French Revolution when the struggle between the residues of the pre-Revolutionary regimes and the Revolutionary regimes was understood as a contest between tradition and reason. The manifest inadequacy of this scheme, which perhaps fitted the situation in the nineteenth century but hardly any other situation, forced Weber to add the charismatic type of legitimacy to the two types imposed on him by his environment. But this addition did not remove, it merely concealed, the basic limitation inherent in his scheme. The addition created the impression that the scheme was now comprehensive, but, in fact, it could not be made comprehensive by any additions because of its parochial origin: not a comprehensive reflection on the nature of political society but merely the experience of two or three generations had supplied the basic orientation. Since

Weber believed that no conceptual scheme used by social science can be of more than ephemeral validity, he was not seriously disturbed by this state of affairs. In particular, he was not seriously disturbed by the danger that the imposition of his definitely "dated" scheme might prevent the unbiased understanding of earlier political situations. He did not wonder whether his scheme fitted the manner in which, say, the protagonists of the great political conflicts recorded in history had conceived of their causes, that is to say, the manner in which they had conceived of the principles of legitimacy. For fundamentally the same reason, he did not hesitate to describe Plato as an "intellectual," without for one moment considering the fact that the whole work of Plato may be described as a critique of the notion of "the intellectual." He did not hesitate to consider the dialogue between the Athenians and Melians in Thucydides' *History* as a sufficient basis for asserting that "in the Hellenic polis of the classical time, a most naked 'Machiavellianism' was regarded as a matter of course in every respect and as wholly unobjectionable from an ethical point of view." To say nothing of other considerations, he did not pause to wonder how Thucydides himself had conceived of that dialogue. He did not hesitate to write: "The fact that Egyptian sages praised obedience, silence, and absence of presumptuousness as godly virtues, had its source in bureaucratic subordination. In Israel, the source was the plebeian character of the clientele." Similarly, his sociological explanation of Hindu thought is based on the premise that natural right "of any kind" presupposes the natural equality of all men, if not even a blessed state at the beginning and at the end. Or, to take what is perhaps the most telling example, when discussing the question of what has to be regarded as the essence of a historical phenomenon like Calvinism, Weber said: By calling something the essence of a historical phenomenon, one either means that aspect of the phenomenon which one considers to

be of permanent value, or else that aspect through which it exercised the greatest historical influence. He did not even allude to a third possibility, which is, in fact, the first and most obvious one, namely, that the essence of Calvinism, e.g., would have to be identified with what Calvin himself regarded as the essence, or as the chief characteristic, of his work.²¹

Weber's methodological principles were bound to affect his work in an adverse manner. We shall illustrate this by glancing at his most famous historical essay, his study on Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism. He contended that Calvinist theology was a major cause of the capitalist spirit. He stressed the fact that the effect was in no way intended by Calvin, that Calvin would have been shocked by it, and—what is more important—that the crucial link in the chain of causation (a peculiar interpretation of the dogma of predestination) was rejected by Calvin but emerged “quite naturally” among the epigones and, above all, among the broad stratum of the general run of Calvinists. Now, if one speaks about a teaching of the rank of Calvin's, the mere reference to “epigones” and the “general run” of men implies a value judgment on that interpretation of the dogma of predestination which these people adopted: epigones and the general run of men are very likely to miss the decisive point. Weber's implied value judgment is fully justified in the eyes of everyone who has understood the theological doctrine of Calvin; the peculiar interpretation of the dogma of predestination that allegedly led to the emergence of the capitalistic spirit is based on a radical misunderstanding of Calvin's doctrine. It is a corruption of that doctrine or, to use Calvin's own language, it is a carnal interpretation of a spiritual teaching. The maximum that Weber could reasonably have claimed to have proved is,

21. *Religionssoziologie*, I, 89; II, 136 n., 143–45; III, 232–33; *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 93–95, 170–73, 184, 199, 206–9, 214, 249–50.

then, that a corruption or degeneration of Calvin's theology led to the emergence of the capitalist spirit. Only by means of this decisive qualification can his thesis be brought into even approximate harmony with the facts to which he refers. But he was prevented from making this crucial qualification because he had imposed on himself the taboo regarding value judgments. By avoiding an indispensable value judgment, he was forced into giving a factually incorrect picture of what had happened. For his fear of value judgments prompted him to identify the essence of Calvinism with its historically most influential aspect. He instinctively avoided identifying the essence of Calvinism with what Calvin himself considered essential, because Calvin's self-interpretation would naturally act as a standard by which to judge objectively the Calvinists who claimed to follow Calvin.²²

22. *Religionssoziologie*, I, 81-82, 103-4, 112. One can hardly say that the problem stated by Weber in his study on the spirit of capitalism has been solved. To prepare a solution, one would have to free Weber's formulation of the problem from the particular limitation which was due to his "Kantianism." He may be said to have rightly identified the spirit of capitalism with the view that limitless accumulation of capital and profitable investment of capital is a moral duty, and perhaps the highest moral duty, and to have rightly contended that this spirit is characteristic of the modern Western world. But he also said that the spirit of capitalism consists in regarding the limitless accumulation of capital as an end in itself. He could not prove the latter contention except by referring to dubious or ambiguous impressions. He was forced to make that contention because he assumed that "moral duty" and "end in itself" are identical. His "Kantianism" also forced him to sever every connection between "moral duty" and "the common good." He was forced to introduce into his analysis of earlier moral thought a distinction, not warranted by the texts, between the "ethical" justification of the unlimited accumulation of capital and its "utilitarian" justification. As a consequence of his peculiar notion of "ethics," every reference to the common good in earlier literature tended to appear to him as a lapse into low utilitarianism. One may venture to say that no writer outside mental institutions ever justified the duty, or the moral right, to unlimited acquisition on any other ground than that of service to the common good. The problem of the genesis of the capitalist spirit is then identical with the problem of the emergence of the minor premise, "but the unlimited accumulation of capital is most conducive to the common good." For the major premise, "it is our duty to devote ourselves to the common good or to the love of our neighbors," was not affected by the emergence of the capitalist spirit. That major

The rejection of value judgments endangers historical objectivity. In the first place, it prevents one from calling a spade a spade. In the second place, it endangers that kind of objectivity which legitimately requires the forgoing of evaluations, namely, the objectivity of interpretation. The historian who

premise was accepted by both the philosophic and the theological tradition. The question, then, is which transformation of the philosophic or of the theological tradition or of both caused the emergence of the minor premise mentioned. Weber took it for granted that the cause must be sought in the transformation of the theological tradition, i.e., in the Reformation. But he did not succeed in tracing the capitalist spirit to the Reformation or, in particular, to Calvinism except by the use of "historical dialectics" or by means of questionable psychological constructions. The utmost one could say is that he traced the capitalist spirit to the corruption of Calvinism. Tawney rightly pointed out that the capitalist Puritanism studied by Weber was late Puritanism or that it was the Puritanism that had already made its peace with "the world." This means that the Puritanism in question had made its peace with the capitalist world already in existence: the Puritanism in question was then not the cause of the capitalist world or of the capitalist spirit. If it is impossible to trace the capitalist spirit to the Reformation, one is forced to wonder whether the minor premise under consideration did not emerge through the transformation of the philosophic tradition, as distinguished from the transformation of the theological tradition. Weber considered the possibility that the origin of the capitalist spirit might have to be sought in the Renaissance, but, as he rightly observed, the Renaissance as such was an attempt to restore the spirit of classical antiquity, i.e., a spirit wholly different from the capitalist spirit. What he failed to consider was that in the course of the sixteenth century there was a conscious break with the whole philosophic tradition, a break that took place on the plane of purely philosophic or rational or secular thought. This break was originated by Machiavelli, and it led to the moral teachings of Bacon and Hobbes: thinkers whose writings preceded by decades those writings of their Puritan countrymen on which Weber's thesis is based. One can hardly say more than that Puritanism, having broken more radically with the "pagan" philosophic tradition (i.e., chiefly with Aristotelianism) than Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism had done, was more open to the new philosophy than were the latter. Puritanism thus could become a very important, and perhaps the most important, "carrier" of the new philosophy both natural and moral—of a philosophy which had been created by men of an entirely non-Puritan stamp. In brief, Weber overestimated the importance of the revolution that had taken place on the plane of theology, and he underestimated the importance of the revolution that had taken place on the plane of rational thought. By paying more careful attention than he did to the purely secular development, one would also be able to restore the connection, arbitrarily severed by him, between the emergence of the capitalist spirit and the emergence of the science of economics (cf. also Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* [1949], pp. 624 and 894).

takes it for granted that objective value judgments are impossible cannot take very seriously that thought of the past which was based on the assumption that objective value judgments are possible, i.e., practically all thought of earlier generations. Knowing beforehand that that thought was based on a fundamental delusion, he lacks the necessary incentive for trying to understand the past as it understood itself.

Almost all that we have said up to this point was necessary in order to clear away the most important obstacles to an understanding of Weber's central thesis. Only now are we able to grasp its precise meaning. Let us reconsider our last example. What Weber should have said was that the corruption of Calvinist theology led to the emergence of the capitalist spirit. This would have implied an objective value judgment on vulgar Calvinism: the epigones unwittingly destroyed what they intended to preserve. Yet this implied value judgment is of very limited significance. It does not prejudge the real issue in any way. For, assuming that Calvinist theology were a bad thing, its corruption was a good thing. What Calvin would have considered a "carnal" understanding could, from another point of view, be approved as a "this-worldly" understanding, leading to such good things as secularist individualism and secularist democracy. Even from the latter point of view, vulgar Calvinism would appear as an impossible position, a halfway house, but preferable to Calvinism proper for the same reason that Sancho Panza may be said to be preferable to Don Quixote. The rejection of vulgar Calvinism is then inevitable from every point of view. But this merely means that only after having rejected vulgar Calvinism is one faced with the real issue: the issue of religion versus irreligion, i.e., of genuine religion versus noble irreligion, as distinguished from the issue of mere sorcery, or mechanical ritualism versus the irreligion of specialists without vision and voluptuaries without heart. It is this real issue which, according to Weber, can-

not be settled by human reason, just as the conflict between different genuine religions of the highest rank (e.g., the conflict between Deutero-Isaiah, Jesus, and Buddha) cannot be settled by human reason. Thus, in spite of the fact that social science stands or falls by value judgments, social science or social philosophy cannot settle the decisive value conflicts. It is indeed true that one has already passed a value judgment when speaking of Gretchen and a prostitute. But this value judgment proves to be merely provisional the moment one comes face to face with a radically ascetic position which condemns all sexuality. From this point of view, the open degradation of sexuality through prostitution may appear to be a cleaner thing than the disguise of the true nature of sexuality through sentiment and poetry. It is indeed true that one cannot speak of human affairs without praising the intellectual and moral virtues and blaming the intellectual and moral vices. But this does not dispose of the possibility that all human virtues would ultimately have to be judged to be no more than splendid vices. It would be absurd to deny that there is an objective difference between a blundering general and a strategic genius. But if war is absolutely evil, the difference between the blundering general and the strategic genius will be on the same level as the difference between a blundering thief and a genius in thievery.

It seems, then, that what Weber really meant by his rejection of value judgments would have to be expressed as follows: The objects of the social sciences are constituted by reference to values. Reference to values presupposes appreciation of values. Such appreciation enables and forces the social scientist to evaluate the social phenomena, i.e., to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious and between the higher and the lower: between genuine religion and spurious religion, between genuine leaders and charlatans, between knowledge and mere lore or sophistry, between virtue and vice, between

moral sensitivity and moral obtuseness, between art and trash, between vitality and degeneracy, etc. Reference to values is incompatible with neutrality; it can never be "purely theoretical." But nonneutrality does not necessarily mean approval; it may also mean rejection. In fact, since the various values are incompatible with one another, the approval of any one value necessarily implies the rejection of some other value or values. Only on the basis of such acceptance or rejection of values, of "ultimate values," do the objects of the social sciences come to sight. For all further work, for the causal analysis of these objects, it must be a matter of indifference whether the student has accepted or rejected the value in question.²³

At any rate, Weber's whole notion of the scope and function of the social sciences rests on the allegedly demonstrable premise that the conflict between ultimate values cannot be resolved by human reason. The question is whether that premise has really been demonstrated, or whether it has merely been postulated under the impulse of a specific moral preference.

At the threshold of Weber's attempt to demonstrate his basic premise, we encounter two striking facts. The first is that Weber, who wrote thousands of pages, devoted hardly more than thirty of them to a thematic discussion of the basis of his whole position. Why was that basis so little in need of proof? Why was it self-evident to him? A provisional answer is supplied by the second observation we can make prior to any analysis of his arguments. As he indicated at the beginning of his discussion of the subject, his thesis was only the generalized version of an older and more common view, namely, that the conflict between ethics and politics is insoluble: political action is sometimes impossible without incurring moral guilt. It seems, then, that it was the spirit of "power politics" that begot Weber's position. Nothing is more revealing than the fact that, in a related context when speaking of conflict and

23. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 90, 124-25, 175, 180-82, 199.

peace, Weber put "peace" in quotation marks, whereas he did not take this precautionary measure when speaking of conflict. Conflict was for Weber an unambiguous thing, but peace was not: peace is phony, but war is real.²⁴

Weber's thesis that there is no solution to the conflict between values was then a part, or a consequence, of the comprehensive view according to which human life is essentially an inescapable conflict. For this reason, "peace and universal happiness" appeared to him to be an illegitimate or fantastic goal. Even if that goal could be reached, he thought, it would not be desirable; it would be the condition of "the last men who have invented happiness," against whom Nietzsche had directed his "devastating criticism." If peace is incompatible with human life or with a truly human life, the moral problem would seem to allow of a clear solution: the nature of things requires a warrior ethics as the basis of a "power politics" that is guided exclusively by considerations of the national interest; or "the most naked Machiavellianism [would have to be] regarded as a matter of course in every respect, and as wholly unobjectionable from an ethical point of view." But we would then be confronted with the paradoxical situation that the individual is at peace with himself while the world is ruled by war. The strife-torn world demands a strife-torn individual. The strife would not go to the root of the individual, if he were not forced to negate the very principle of war: he must negate the war from which he cannot escape and to which he must dedicate himself, as evil or sinful. Lest there be peace anywhere, peace must not be simply rejected. It is not sufficient to recognize peace as the necessary breathing time between wars. There must be an absolute duty directing us toward universal peace or universal brotherhood, a duty conflicting with the equally high duty that directs us to participate in "the eternal struggle" for "elbow room" for our nation. Conflict

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 466, 479; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 17-18, 310.

would not be supreme if guilt could be escaped. The question of whether one can speak of guilt, if man is forced to become guilty, was no longer discussed by Weber: he needed the necessity of guilt. He had to combine the anguish bred by atheism (the absence of any redemption, of any solace) with the anguish bred by revealed religion (the oppressive sense of guilt). Without that combination, life would cease to be tragic and thus lose its depth.²⁵

Weber assumed as a matter of course that there is no hierarchy of values: all values are of the same rank. Now, precisely if this is the case, a social scheme that satisfies the requirements of two values is preferable to one whose scope is more limited. The comprehensive scheme might demand that some of the requirements of each of the two values would have to be sacrificed. In this case the question would arise as to whether the extreme or one-sided schemes are not so good as, or are better than, the apparently more comprehensive schemes. To answer that question, one would have to know whether it is at all possible to adopt one of the two values, while unqualifiedly rejecting the other. If it is impossible, some sacrifice of the apparent requirements of the two component values would be a dictate of reason. The optimal scheme might not be realizable except under certain very favorable conditions, and the actual conditions here and now may be very unfavorable. This would not deprive the optimal scheme of its importance, because it would remain indispensable as the basis for rational judgment about the various imperfect schemes. In particular, its importance would be in no way affected by the fact that in given situations one can choose only between two equally imperfect schemes. Last but not least, in all reflections on such matters one must not be oblivious for one moment of the general significance for social

25. *Politische Schriften*, pp. 18, 20; *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 540, 550; *Religionssoziologie*, I, 568-69.

life of extremism, on the one hand, and moderation, on the other. Weber pushed all considerations of this character aside by declaring that "the middle line is no whit more scientifically correct than the most extreme party ideals of the right and the left" and that the middle line is even inferior to the extreme solutions, since it is less unambiguous.²⁶ The question, of course, is whether social science does not have to be concerned with sensible solutions to social problems and whether moderation is not more sensible than extremism. However sensible Weber may have been as a practical politician, however much he may have abhorred the spirit of narrow party fanaticism, as a social scientist he approached social problems in a spirit that had nothing in common with the spirit of statesmanship and that could serve no other practical end than to encourage narrow obstinacy. His unshakable faith in the supremacy of conflict forced him to have at least as high a regard for extremism as for moderate courses.

But we can no longer delay turning to Weber's attempts to prove his contention that the ultimate values are simply in conflict with one another. We shall have to limit ourselves to a discussion of two or three specimens of his proofs.²⁷ The first

26. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 154, 461.

27. While Weber referred rather frequently in general terms to a considerable number of insoluble value conflicts, his attempt to prove his basic contention is limited, as far as I can see, to the discussion of three or four examples. The example which will not be discussed in the text concerns the conflict between eroticism and all impersonal or supra-personal values: a genuine erotic relation between a man and a woman can be regarded, "from a certain standpoint," "as the sole or at any rate as the most royal road" to a genuine life; if someone opposes all saintliness or all goodness, all ethical or aesthetic norms, everything that is valuable from the point of view of culture or of personality, in the name of genuine erotic passion, reason has to be absolutely silent. The particular standpoint which permits or fosters this attitude is not, as one might expect, that of Carmen but that of intellectuals who suffer from the specialization or "professionalization" of life. To such people "marriage-free sexual life could appear as the only link that still connects man (who by then had completely left the cycle of the old, simple, and organic peasant existence) with the natural source of all life." It is probably sufficient to say that appearances may be deceptive. But we feel compelled to

one is the example that he used in order to illustrate the character of most issues of social policy. Social policy is concerned with justice; but what justice in society requires cannot be decided, according to Weber, by any ethics. Two opposed views are equally legitimate or defensible. According to the first view, one owes much to him who achieves or contributes much; according to the second view, one should demand much from him who can achieve or contribute much. If one adopts the first view, one would have to grant great opportunities to great talent. If one adopts the second view, one would have to prevent the talented individual from exploiting his superior opportunities. We shall not complain about the loose way in which Weber stated what he considered, rather strangely, an insuperable difficulty. We merely note that he did not think it necessary to indicate any reason by which the first view can be supported. The second view, however, seemed to require an explicit argument. According to Weber, one may argue, as Babeuf did, in the following way: the injustice of the unequal distribution of mental gifts and the gratifying feeling of prestige which attends the mere possession of superior gifts have to be compensated by social measures destined to prevent the talented individual from exploiting his great opportunities. Before one could say that this view is tenable, one would have to know whether it makes sense to say that nature committed an injustice by distributing her gifts unequally, whether it is a duty of society to remedy that injustice, and whether envy has a right to be heard. But even if one would grant that Babeuf's

add that, according to Weber, this late return to the most natural in man is bound up with what he chose to call "die systematische Herauspräparierung der Sexualsphäre" (*Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 468-69; *Religionssoziologie*, I, 560-62). He thus proved indeed that eroticism as he understood it conflicts with "all esthetic norms"; but he proved at the same time that the intellectuals' attempt to escape specialization through eroticism merely leads to specialization in eroticism (cf. *Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 540). He proved, in other words, that his erotic Weltanschauung is not defensible before the tribunal of human reason.

view, as stated by Weber, is as defensible as the first view, what would follow? That we have to make a blind choice? That we have to incite the adherents of the two opposed views to insist on their opinions with all the obstinacy that they can muster? If, as Weber contends, no solution is morally superior to the other, the reasonable consequence would be that the decision has to be transferred from the tribunal of ethics to that of convenience or expediency. Weber emphatically excluded considerations of expediency from the discussion of this issue. If demands are made in the name of justice, he declared, consideration of which solution would supply the best "incentives" is out of place. But is there no connection between justice and the good of society, and between the good of society and incentives to socially valuable activity? Precisely if Weber were right in asserting that the two opposite views are equally defensible, would social science as an objective science have to stigmatize as a crackpot any man who insisted that only one of the views is in accordance with justice.²⁸

Our second example is Weber's alleged proof that there is an insoluble conflict between what he calls the "ethics of responsibility" and the "ethics of intention." According to the former, man's responsibility extends to the foreseeable consequences of his actions, whereas, according to the latter, man's responsibility is limited to the intrinsic rightness of his actions. Weber illustrated the ethics of intention by the example of syndicalism: the syndicalist is concerned not with the consequences or the success of his revolutionary activity but with his own integrity, with preserving in himself and awakening in others a certain moral attitude and nothing else. Even a conclusive proof that in a given situation his revolutionary activity would be destructive, for all the foreseeable future, of the very existence of revolutionary workers would not be a valid argument against a convinced syndicalist. Weber's convinced

28. *Wissenschaftslehre*, p. 467.

syndicalist is an *ad hoc* construction, as is shown by his remark that if the syndicalist is consistent, his kingdom is not of this world. In other words, if he were consistent, he would cease to be a syndicalist, i.e., a man who is concerned with the liberation of the working class in this world, and by means belonging to this world. The ethics of intention, which Weber imputed to syndicalism, is, in reality, an ethics alien to all this-worldly social or political movements. As he stated on another occasion, within the dimension of social action proper "the ethics of intention and the ethics of responsibility are not absolute opposites, but supplement each other: both united constitute the genuine human being." That ethics of intention that is incompatible with what Weber once called the ethics of a genuine human being is a certain interpretation of Christian ethics or, more generally expressed, a strictly otherworldly ethics. What Weber really meant when speaking of the insoluble conflict between the ethics of intention and the ethics of responsibility was, then, that the conflict between this-worldly ethics and otherworldly ethics is insoluble by human reason.²⁹

Weber was convinced that, on the basis of a strictly this-worldly orientation, no objective norms are possible: there cannot be "absolutely valid" and, at the same time, specific norms except on the basis of revelation. Yet he never proved that the unassisted human mind is incapable of arriving at objective norms or that the conflict between different this-worldly ethical doctrines is insoluble by human reason. He merely proved that otherworldly ethics, or rather a certain

29. For a more adequate discussion of the problem of "responsibility" and "intention" compare Thomas Aquinas *Summa theologiae* i. 2. qu. 20, a. 5; Burke, *Present Discontents* (*The Works of Edmund Burke* ["Bohn's Standard Library"], I, 375-77); Lord Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln* (Pocket Books ed.), pp. 136-37, 164-65; Churchill, *Marlborough*, VI, 599-600. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 467, 475, 476, 546; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 441-44, 448-49, 62-63; *Soziologie und Sozialpolitik*, pp. 512-14; *Religionssoziologie*, II, 193-94.

type of otherworldly ethics, is incompatible with those standards of human excellence or of human dignity which the unassisted human mind discerns. One could say, without in the least becoming guilty of irreverence, that the conflict between this-worldly and otherworldly ethics need not be of serious concern to social science. As Weber himself pointed out, social science attempts to understand social life from a this-worldly point of view. Social science is human knowledge of human life. Its light is the natural light. It tries to find rational or reasonable solutions to social problems. The insights and solutions at which it arrives might be questioned on the basis of superhuman knowledge or of divine revelation. But, as Weber indicated, social science as such cannot take notice of such questionings, because they are based on presuppositions which can never be evident to unassisted human reason. By accepting presuppositions of this character, social science would transform itself into either Jewish or Christian or Islamic or Buddhist or some other "denominational" social science. In addition, if genuine insights of social science can be questioned on the basis of revelation, revelation is not merely above reason but against reason. Weber had no compunction in saying that every belief in revelation is ultimately belief in the absurd. Whether this view of Weber, who, after all, was not a theological authority, is compatible with an intelligent belief in revelation need not concern us here.³⁰

Once it is granted that social science, or this-worldly understanding of human life, is evidently legitimate, the difficulty raised by Weber appears to be irrelevant. But he refused to grant that premise. He contended that science or philosophy rests, in the last analysis, not on evident premises that are at the disposal of man as man but on faith. Granting that only science or philosophy can lead to the truth which man can

30. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 33, n. 2, 39, 154, 379, 466, 469, 471, 540, 542, 545-47, 550-54; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 62-63; *Religionssoziologie*, I, 566.

know, he raised the question of whether the search for knowable truth is good, and he decided that this question can no longer be answered by science or philosophy. Science or philosophy is unable to give a clear or certain account of its own basis. The goodness of science or philosophy was no problem as long as one could think that it is "the way to true being" or to "true nature" or to "true happiness." But these expectations have proved to be illusory. Henceforth, science or philosophy can have no other goal than to ascertain that very limited truth which is accessible to man. Yet, in spite of this amazing change in the character of science or philosophy, the quest for truth continues to be regarded as valuable in itself, and not merely with a view to its practical results—which, in their turn, are of questionable value: to increase man's power means to increase his power for evil as well as for good. By regarding the quest for truth as valuable in itself, one admits that one is making a preference which no longer has a good or sufficient reason. One recognizes therewith the principle that preferences do not need good or sufficient reasons. Accordingly, those who regard the quest for truth as valuable in itself may regard such activities as the understanding of the genesis of a doctrine, or the editing of a text—nay, the conjectural correction of any corrupt reading in any manuscript—as ends in themselves: the quest for truth has the same dignity as stamp collecting. Every pursuit, every whim, becomes as defensible or as legitimate as any other. But Weber did not always go so far. He also said that the goal of science is clarity, i.e., clarity about the great issues, and this means ultimately clarity not indeed about the whole but about the situation of man as man. Science or philosophy is then the way toward freedom from delusion; it is the foundation of a free life, of a life that refuses to bring the sacrifice of the intellect and dares to look reality in its stern face. It is concerned with the knowable truth, which is valid regardless of whether we like it or

not. Weber went up to this point. But he refused to say that science or philosophy is concerned with the truth which is valid for all men regardless of whether they desire to know it or not. What stopped him? Why did he deny to the knowable truth its inescapable power?³¹

He was inclined to believe that twentieth-century man has eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, or can be free from the delusions which blinded all earlier men: we see the situation of man without delusions; we are disenchanted. But under the influence of historicism, he became doubtful whether one can speak of the situation of man as man or, if one can, whether this situation is not seen differently in different ages in such a manner that, in principle, the view of any age is as legitimate or as illegitimate as that of any other. He wondered, therefore, whether what appeared to be the situation of man as man was more than the situation of present-day man, or "the inescapable datum of our historical situation." Hence what originally appeared as freedom from delusions presented itself eventually as hardly more than the questionable premise of our age or as an attitude that will be superseded, in due time, by an attitude that will be in conformity with the next epoch. The thought of the present age is characterized by disenchantment or unqualified "this-worldliness," or irreligion. What claims to be freedom from delusions is as much and as little delusion as the faiths which prevailed in the past and which may prevail in the future. We are irreligious because fate forces us to be irreligious and for no other reason. Weber refused to bring the sacrifice of the intellect; he did not wait for a religious revival or for prophets or saviors; and he was not at all certain whether a religious revival would follow the present age. But he was certain that all devotion to causes or ideals has its roots in religious faith and, therefore, that the

31. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 60-61, 184, 213, 251, 469, 531, 540, 547, 549; *Politische Schriften*, pp. 128, 213; *Religionssoziologie*, I, 569-70.

decline of religious faith will ultimately lead to the extinction of all causes or ideals. He tended to see before him the alternative of either complete spiritual emptiness or religious revival. He despaired of the modern this-worldly irreligious experiment, and yet he remained attached to it because he was fated to believe in science as he understood it. The result of this conflict, which he could not resolve, was his belief that the conflict between values cannot be resolved by human reason.³²

Yet the crisis of modern life and of modern science does not necessarily make doubtful the idea of science. We must therefore try to state in more precise terms what Weber had in mind when he said that science seemed to be unable to give a clear or certain account of itself.

Man cannot live without light, guidance, knowledge; only through knowledge of the good can he find the good that he needs. The fundamental question, therefore, is whether men can acquire that knowledge of the good without which they cannot guide their lives individually or collectively by the unaided efforts of their natural powers, or whether they are dependent for that knowledge on Divine Revelation. No alternative is more fundamental than this: human guidance or divine guidance. The first possibility is characteristic of philosophy or science in the original sense of the term, the second is presented in the Bible. The dilemma cannot be evaded by any harmonization or synthesis. For both philosophy and the Bible proclaim something as the one thing needful, as the only thing that ultimately counts, and the one thing needful proclaimed by the Bible is the opposite of that proclaimed by philosophy: a life of obedient love versus a life of free insight. In every attempt at harmonization, in every synthesis however impressive, one of the two opposed elements is sacrificed, more or less subtly but in any event surely, to the other: philosophy,

32. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 546-47, 551-55; *Religionssoziologie*, I, 204, 523.

which means to be the queen, must be made the handmaid of revelation or vice versa.

If we take a bird's-eye view of the secular struggle between philosophy and theology, we can hardly avoid the impression that neither of the two antagonists has ever succeeded in really refuting the other. All arguments in favor of revelation seem to be valid only if belief in revelation is presupposed; and all arguments against revelation seem to be valid only if unbelief is presupposed. This state of things would appear to be but natural. Revelation is always so uncertain to unassisted reason that it can never compel the assent of unassisted reason, and man is so built that he can find his satisfaction, his bliss, in free investigation, in articulating the riddle of being. But, on the other hand, he yearns so much for a solution of that riddle and human knowledge is always so limited that the need for divine illumination cannot be denied and the possibility of revelation cannot be refuted. Now it is this state of things that seems to decide irrevocably against philosophy and in favor of revelation. Philosophy has to grant that revelation is possible. But to grant that revelation is possible means to grant that philosophy is perhaps not the one thing needful, that philosophy is perhaps something infinitely unimportant. To grant that revelation is possible means to grant that the philosophic life is not necessarily, not evidently, *the* right life. Philosophy, the life devoted to the quest for evident knowledge available to man as man, would itself rest on an unevident, arbitrary, or blind decision. This would merely confirm the thesis of faith, that there is no possibility of consistency, of a consistent and thoroughly sincere life, without belief in revelation. The mere fact that philosophy and revelation cannot refute each other would constitute the refutation of philosophy by revelation.

It was the conflict between revelation and philosophy or science in the full sense of the term and the implications of that conflict that led Weber to assert that the idea of science or

philosophy suffers from a fatal weakness. He tried to remain faithful to the cause of autonomous insight, but he despaired when he felt that the sacrifice of the intellect, which is abhorred by science or philosophy, is at the bottom of science or philosophy.

But let us hasten back from these awful depths to a superficiality which, while not exactly gay, promises at least a quiet sleep. Having come up to the surface again, we are welcomed by about six hundred large pages covered with the smallest possible number of sentences, as well as with the largest possible number of footnotes, and devoted to the methodology of the social sciences. Yet we notice very soon that we have not escaped trouble. For Weber's methodology is something different from what methodology usually is. All intelligent students of Weber's methodology have felt that it is philosophic. It is possible to articulate that feeling. Methodology, as reflection on the correct procedure of science, is necessarily reflection on the limitations of science. If science is indeed the highest form of human knowledge, it is reflection on the limitations of human knowledge. And if it is knowledge that constitutes the specific character of man among all earthly beings, methodology is reflection on the limitations of humanity or on the situation of man as man. Weber's methodology comes very close to meeting this demand.

To remain somewhat nearer to what he himself thought of his methodology, we shall say that his notion of science, both natural and social, is based on a specific view of reality. For, according to him, scientific understanding consists in a peculiar transformation of reality. It is therefore impossible to clarify the meaning of science without a previous analysis of reality as it is in itself, i.e., prior to its transformation by science. Weber did not say much about this subject. He was less concerned with the character of reality than with the different ways in which reality is transformed by the different types of

science. For his primary concern was with preserving the integrity of the historical or cultural sciences against two apparent dangers: against the attempt to shape these sciences on the pattern of the natural sciences and against the attempt to interpret the dualism of natural and historical-cultural sciences in terms of a metaphysical dualism ("body-mind" or "necessity-freedom"). But his methodological theses remain unintelligible, or at any rate irrelevant, if one does not translate them into theses regarding the character of reality. When he demanded, for example, that interpretive understanding be subservient to causal explanation, he was guided by the observation that the intelligible is frequently overpowered by what is no longer intelligible or that the lower is mostly stronger than the higher. In addition, his preoccupations left him time to indicate his view of what reality is prior to its transformation by science. According to him, reality is an infinite and meaningless sequence, or a chaos, of unique and infinitely divisible events, which in themselves are meaningless: all meaning, all articulation, originates in the activity of the knowing or evaluating subject. Very few people today will be satisfied with this view of reality, which Weber had taken over from neo-Kantianism and which he modified merely by adding one or two emotional touches. It is sufficient to remark that he himself was unable to adhere consistently to that view. He certainly could not deny that there is an articulation of reality that precedes all scientific articulation: that articulation, that wealth of meaning, which we have in mind when speaking of the world of common experience or of the natural understanding of the world.³³ But he did not even attempt a coherent analysis of the social world as it is known to "common sense," or of social reality as it is known in social life or in action. The place of such an analysis is occupied in his work by defini-

33. *Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 5, 35, 50-51, 61, 67, 71, 126, 127 n., 132-34, 161-62, 166, 171, 173, 175, 177-78, 180, 208, 389, 503.

tions of ideal types, of artificial constructs which are not even meant to correspond to the intrinsic articulation of social reality and which, in addition, are meant to be of a strictly ephemeral character. Only a comprehensive analysis of social reality as we know it in actual life, and as men always have known it since there have been civil societies, would permit an adequate discussion of the possibility of an evaluating social science. Such an analysis would make intelligible the fundamental alternatives which essentially belong to social life and would therewith supply a basis for responsible judgment on whether the conflict between these alternatives is, in principle, susceptible of a solution.

In the spirit of a tradition of three centuries, Weber would have rejected the suggestion that social science must be based on an analysis of social reality as it is experienced in social life or known to "common sense." According to that tradition, "common sense" is a hybrid, begotten by the absolutely subjective world of the individual's sensations and the truly objective world progressively discovered by science. This view stems from the seventeenth century, when modern thought emerged by virtue of a break with classical philosophy. But the originators of modern thought still agreed with the classics in so far as they conceived of philosophy or science as the perfection of man's natural understanding of the natural world. They differed from the classics in so far as they opposed the new philosophy or science, as the truly natural understanding of the world, to the perverted understanding of the world had by classical and medieval philosophy or science, or by "the school."³⁴ The victory of the new philosophy or science was decided by the victory of its decisive part, namely, the new physics. That victory led eventually to the result that

34. Compare Jacob Klein, "Die griechische Logistik und die Entstehung der modernen Algebra," *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik, Astronomie und Physik* (1936), III, 125.

the new physics and the new natural science in general became independent of the rump of philosophy which from then on came to be called "philosophy" in contradistinction to "science"; and, in fact, "science" became the authority for "philosophy." "Science," we may say, is the successful part of modern philosophy or science, whereas "philosophy" is its less successful part. Thus not modern philosophy but modern natural science came to be regarded as the perfection of man's natural understanding of the natural world. But in the nineteenth century it became more and more apparent that a drastic distinction must be made between what was then called the "scientific" understanding (or "the world of science") and the "natural" understanding (or "the world in which we live"). It became apparent that the scientific understanding of the world emerges by way of a radical modification, as distinguished from a perfection, of the natural understanding. Since the natural understanding is the presupposition of the scientific understanding, the analysis of science and of the world of science presupposes the analysis of the natural understanding, the natural world, or the world of common sense. The natural world, the world in which we live and act, is not the object or the product of a theoretical attitude; it is a world not of mere objects at which we detachedly look but of "things" or "affairs" which we handle. Yet as long as we identify the natural or prescientific world with the world in which we live, we are dealing with an abstraction. The world in which we live is already a product of science, or at any rate it is profoundly affected by the existence of science. To say nothing of technology, the world in which we live is free from ghosts, witches, and so on, with which, but for the existence of science, it would abound. To grasp the natural world as a world that is radically prescientific or prephilosophic, one has to go back behind the first emergence of science or philosophy. It is not

necessary for this purpose to engage in extensive and necessarily hypothetical anthropological studies. The information that classical philosophy supplies about its origins suffices, especially if that information is supplemented by consideration of the most elementary premises of the Bible, for reconstructing the essential character of "the natural world." By using that information, so supplemented, one would be enabled to understand the origin of the idea of natural right.